

BN Likely To Retain 137 Parliamentary Seats It Now Holds
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- The Barisan Nasional (BN) is likely to retain the 137 parliamentary seats it now holds with five percent margin on either side, but not enough to reach two-thirds majority, according to a research and detail analysis by the Centre of Strategic Engagement (CENSE).

The recently concluded research pointed out that much would still depend on the strength and organisation of BN's election machinery.

"Based on current sentiment, CENSE's prediction is that BN could lose up to 10 seats in the Chinese-dominated constituencies in Johor, Sabah and Sarawak.

"The Chinese media has taken a strong stand on "police brutality" during Bersih 3.0 by printing the newspapers in only black and white, and encouraging journalists and sympathisers to wear only black for World Press Freedom Day," it said.

It added, that has put Chinese seats in Johor, Sabah and Sarawak in an even more vulnerable position for the BN.

On the other hand, CENSE said there was much stronger return of the Malay vote swing, approximately eight percent since 2008, which should see gains in Malay-dominated and Malay-mixed seats, especially for UMNO.

The opposition party that is likely to suffer at the expense of UMNO will be PKR.

The centre said factors influencing the 13th General Election's outcome include - sentiment, issues, leadership, infrastructure, logistics, funding and campaign machinery, and the campaign will demonstrate if the BN machinery has truly adapted to the new political landscape, one in which the opposition dominated, the cyber-warfare.

"The opposition knows how to play up crowd sentiment, and recognises the power that social media has in reaching out to younger voters. BN, meanwhile, will have the upper hand with logistics and infrastructure of its machinery, particularly in the rural areas of Sabah, Sarawak, Pahang and some parts of Johor," it said.

Still, BN seems to have a much stronger election machinery as it is now more organised and is governed by more realistic assumptions compared with 2008.

"However, what causes concern for the BN this time is the low morale among party members and workers in the Chinese-majority areas or in mixed seats where the Chinese make up a significant proportion of the voter base," it added.

Therefore, it believed the BN was realistic enough to realise it cannot wrest Penang and Kelantan back from the opposition but harbouring some degrees of hope of retaining Perak as well as gaining both Kedah and Selangor. However, the chance of regaining Selangor is still slim.

In the report, CENSE also pointed out despite a convincing swing in Malay votes for UMNO,

it was still 50:50. This is because the delineation of electoral seats in the country is racially based. Therefore, an increase in Malay votes will raise the margin of majority but this does not mean more seats can be won.

"By the same argument, more Chinese votes for the opposition will also have a limited effect as it will only be confined to Chinese-majority seats such as Seputeh in the Federal Territories, Petaling Jaya Utara in Selangor, Kota Kinabalu in Sabah and Kuching in Sarawak," it said.

The report also pointed out that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's biggest challenge within the BN was how to translate his popularity into votes for UMNO and BN, particularly in the non-Malay areas and in the mixed seats in Perak, Selangor, Johor, Sabah and Sarawak.

He still needs the support of the minority groups for his party to fare better than in 2008.

CENSE also pointed out that based on their readings after the April 28 Bersih 3.0 rally, the Malay ground has consolidated strongly in favour of UMNO, which meant that UMNO should win more than 79 seats in the upcoming elections.

An analysis of the events of Bersih 3.0 also shows that the issue of freedom of speech and the right to assemble are going to be a part of mainstream politics while the power of social media cannot be underestimated in the mobilisation of large crowds.

This is regardless whether it is for a genuine show of solidarity or mere experience of democratic freedom.

The CENSE study also showed that a good part of the Chinese vote remains unaffected by Bersih 3.0 due to continued "disenchantment" over longstanding issues of poor delivery, governance and meritocracy.

Bersih 3.0 may, at best, persuade older Chinese voters to return to the BN for fear of potential riots and unrest.

The report also stated that not all middle class urban Malays are prepared to embrace governance and meritocracy and this could tip the votes in favour of UMNO.

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